

Wildlife Division Draft: 12/17/2015

# THE GPS - GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife Division Strategic Plan 2016-2020

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## IMPLEMENTING THE GPS

The GPS is our strategic plan to set the overarching direction for the Wildlife Division. Here are a couple of examples of how we implement the GPS, these are our more tactical plans:

- More bang for your buck sheets
- Deer Plan
- Wildlife Action Plan
- Master Plans

## GETTING STARTED

Our State's wildlife is a resource that belongs to all of us and provides recreation, enjoyment, and reflection. Wildlife has shaped how our state was settled; it impacts our State's economy, attracts tourists, and is critical to our future. The Wildlife Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is responsible for managing this public resource to be enjoyed today and conserved for tomorrow. We are on a journey to ensure that wildlife conservation continues to play a defining role in Michigan. This document, *Guiding Principles and Strategies*, or *GPS*, first developed in 2010 and updated here, sets our strategic direction for the management of Michigan's unique wildlife resources for the next five years of our journey.

We are truly fortunate in this country that wildlife belongs to the public. Because the public owns wildlife, the government is given the privilege and responsibility for managing wildlife for the benefit of everyone. This public trust doctrine, along with dedicated fund sources established in 1937, is at the core of wildlife restoration and management in the United States.

Success in Michigan has mirrored success at the national level. What began as the Game Division in 1928 was transformed into the Wildlife Division in 1968. Throughout our history, we have worked tirelessly to fulfill our public trust responsibilities to enhance, restore, and conserve the State's wildlife resources. Highly visible success stories include white-tailed deer, black bear, and wild turkey, all of which were virtually extirpated in Michigan in the early 1900s.

Management throughout the 20th century focused on restoring populations decimated by over-harvest, loss of habitat, and environmental contamination. The early 21st century brings new management challenges. Although Michigan citizens continue to care deeply about wildlife and our natural resources, many are less connected to the natural world. Changes in technology and our economy have led to changes in land use patterns, rural development, and agricultural practices. Changes in the distribution and abundance of some species have led to increased human-wildlife conflicts. Declines in the number of hunters and trappers, and increases in the numbers of non-consumptive users of wildlife, have created both challenges and opportunities.

There are also challenges related to funding. Our funding primarily comes from participation in hunting and trapping, yet our public trust mandate covers all wildlife and there is growing demand to broaden our emphasis. There had not been a general increase in hunting and trapping license fees for 17 years, which significantly reduced the buying power generated from this revenue for wildlife management. In 2014, the Michigan legislature adopted a simpler, more fair

and efficient license pricing structure bringing us closer to addressing priority issues while balancing the needs of competing interests.

This GPS clearly defines the principles that guide the Wildlife Division's work and the strategies to reach our goals and objectives. This GPS helps us set priorities for wildlife management and coordination of conservation efforts with our partners. It has also helped us grow into a more responsive agency to better serve the public while addressing contemporary and emerging wildlife issues. This growth was further encouraged and supported by extensive engagement with concerned interest groups, stakeholders, the Natural Resources Commission, the Legislature, conservation partners, and the public.

Naming this document GPS was intentional, and it has pointed us toward our destination over the last five years. We have encountered some unforeseen opportunities as well as some detours and roadblocks, but this GPS is flexible and was able to grow with the changes along the way. As this journey has no real end, this GPS has been updated to guide us through the next five years.

## **PLOTTING OUR COURSE**

As a Division within the Department of Natural Resources, we are proud that the GPS is on the same route as our Departmental goals to:

- Protect natural and cultural resources
- Ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment
- Enable strong natural resource-based economies
- Improve and build strong relationships and partnerships
- Foster effective business practices and good governance

## **HELP ALONG THE WAY**

The Wildlife Division could not get a fix on our position and determine the best routes to our destinations alone. We are deeply grateful to all that participated, and shared their time, thoughts, and vision not only in creating the first GPS but in navigating this update as well:

The citizens of Michigan

Hunters and trappers

Other wildlife enthusiasts

Land conservancies

Sporting clubs and conservation organizations

The forest products industry and agricultural producers

Manufacturers and retailers of wildlife related recreational goods

State, local, tribal, and federal governments

Researchers and universities

The Natural Resources Commission

The Michigan Legislature

Department of Natural Resources and Environment leadership and staff

Wildlife Division staff

## **GROUND TRUTHING**

### ***Why We Developed the GPS***

The GPS is our navigational aid to:

- Clearly articulate the principles that will guide our work and the strategies for accomplishing our mission and goals.
- Provide clear direction and help set priorities.
- Help guide the Natural Resources Commission and the Department of Natural Resources leadership in developing and implementing priorities and policies.
- Assist other agencies and conservation partners in developing plans and programs that are compatible with our public trust responsibilities
- Engage the public and other stakeholders and involve them in setting the destination for wildlife management.
- Align our efforts with other planning efforts of the Department and our partners.
- Make the Division more adaptive and more appropriately responsive to contemporary and emerging wildlife issues.
- Increase efficiencies while improving the way our Division conducts business.
- Improve interactions with our partners, stakeholders, and the general public.

### ***How We Developed the GPS***

The first version of the GPS was developed from an engagement process that was open, transparent, and involved hundreds of individuals and organizations from across the state and extensive input from Wildlife Division staff. Key input opportunities included, but weren't limited to:

- Forty-one focus group meetings for internal and external stakeholders were held around the state during January-March 2010. Over 1,800 people were invited and 267 people attended these meetings.
- Sixty-four personal interviews were conducted with state legislators, Natural Resources Commission members, Department Directors and Executive staff, heads of key stakeholder groups, and Federal agency program leaders.
- An informational website and email address for submitting comments and questions were established in March 2010.
- Over 500 Department employees responded to an on-line survey of their opinions on working with the Wildlife Division.
- Multiple opportunities for Division staff to participate in developing the plan.

Because so many people and groups were involved with the development of this plan, the document and the subsequent implementation and update is a reflection of their values, passions, and hard work.

The 2016 GPS update was developed through a streamlined approach similar to the original development. The update is based on stakeholder engagement from the initial development of the plan and reflects the Division's implementation and accomplishments over the last 5 years.

- Conducted an evaluation through a survey of all Division staff on implementation of the plan, with 127 responses.
- Interviewed all supervisors on how the GPS is being used and how to make it more effective going forward.
- Held 11 workshops with staff, 88 participants, to review evaluations and update the goals, objectives, and strategies.
- Conducted a survey for all staff to review the updates, with over 80 responses. The plan was then updated.
- Shared draft with over 500 stakeholders, held 2 feedback sessions, and several follow up interviews. Met with Natural Resources Commissioners to solicit additional input. Feedback was reviewed and the plan was updated.
- In January 2016, the plan was available for a public review and then finalized.

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## TRUE NORTH

### ***Our Mission:***

*To enhance, restore and conserve the State's wildlife resources, natural communities, and ecosystems for the benefit of Michigan's citizens, visitors and future generations.*

### ***Our Principles:***

***Public Service:*** The Wildlife Division believes it has the privilege and responsibility to serve the public by managing wildlife populations and habitat for the use and enjoyment by the citizens of Michigan and by communicating effectively and helping ensure the public understands wildlife management.

***Public Trust Responsibilities:*** The Wildlife Division believes in the public trust doctrine; that wildlife resources are held in trust for the people of Michigan, and it is the privilege and responsibility of the Division to manage those resources wisely.

*Scientific Management of Wildlife Resources:* The Wildlife Division believes in the principles of scientific management of wildlife resources. Scientific management is in the public interest and sound science will be used to inform management decisions and to evaluate the course of those decisions.

*Sustainability:* The Wildlife Division believes it is our responsibility to facilitate the resolution of wildlife issues in a fashion that conserves the long-term viability of populations and the habitats upon which they depend.

*Principles of Ecosystem Management:* The Wildlife Division believes in a management approach that integrates biological, social, and economic factors into a comprehensive strategy aimed at protecting and enhancing sustainability, diversity, and productivity of wildlife resources.

*Adaptive Management:* The Wildlife Division recognizes that our understanding of many ecosystem functions is incomplete and will improve with new information. Management approaches will be viewed as hypotheses to be tested by research, monitoring, and evaluation. This adaptive, empirical approach is useful and will be applied to processes used by the Division whenever possible.

*Trust and Credibility:* The Wildlife Division believes that trust and credibility are possible only when there is open and two-way communication.

*Competence:* The Wildlife Division believes that truly effective and efficient management can be achieved when personnel are well-trained, objective, and professional.

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## **ESTABLISHING WAYPOINTS – *STRATEGIC ISSUES***

Our engagement process identified 13 strategic issues, they are:

### ***Wildlife Population Management***

Most of Michigan's citizens agree that wildlife are important, but distribution and abundance of a particular species plays a role in how they are valued. The distribution and abundance of populations vary across the landscape and are influenced by many factors. While human actions can have positive effects on the availability of food and shelter through habitat management, other factors (such as climate, soils, and sources of water) can limit distribution and abundance. Disease can also be a limiting factor, which management actions can often mitigate. Public opinion and perception of wildlife abundance and distribution are diverse. Themes range from "too many" of some species to "not enough" of other species, and individual opinions often conflict. Values placed on wildlife may include the consumptive value of game species, the recreational value of non-game species, or the intrinsic value of threatened and endangered species, or any combination of the three. Other groups and individuals may devalue wildlife because wildlife may influence their livelihood (e.g., crop damage, urban nuisance animals). The definitions of healthy and sustainable differ among citizens and stakeholder groups. Any attempt

to balance conflicting values is inherently controversial. The Wildlife Division continually strives to be a good steward of Michigan's wildlife resources.

### ***Wildlife Habitat Management***

Manipulation of habitat conditions to influence the distribution and abundance of wildlife species is key to the management of wildlife. Habitat manipulations typically benefit some species while discouraging others. Many techniques are used to achieve habitat goals, including managing water in wetlands, timber harvest, tree planting, prescribed burning, and retention of dead trees and downed logs in forests. Although targeted timber cutting is one of the most frequently used land-management techniques in Michigan today, particularly in partnership with the Department's Forest Resources Division, it is not widely recognized by many citizens as an important part of wildlife management. The Division manages wildlife habitat on Department-owned lands and helps private landowners meet their wildlife goals. The Division continues to work with partners to address the growing challenges of invasive species, climate change, diseases, and emerging issues for the long-term conservation and management of wildlife and their habitats.

### ***Land Use and Economic Development***

Hunting alone contributes \$2.3 billion to our state's economy. Wildlife watching contributes another \$1.2 billion. Much of this activity occurs on private land and depends on wise land use decisions that place a high value on wildlife and wildlife habitat. Yet, land use pressures have resulted in many impacts on wildlife through habitat loss, alteration, and fragmentation. This has made it a challenge to maintain some wildlife populations and to manage negative impacts from other wildlife populations. Historically, land use decisions have been entrusted to local units of government but too often natural resource impacts have not been considered. Although Michigan's human population has stabilized, with a corresponding slow down in land use changes, global increases in human populations will affect demands for Michigan's agriculture, water resources, energy production, housing, and manufacturing. Although there is no statewide policy with regard to consistent multi-jurisdictional land use planning, the Wildlife Division is committed to maintaining and creating partnerships across Michigan. Because the Wildlife Division manages or co-manages over four million acres of state land, we affect land use in many communities in the northern two-thirds of the state and can be a great partner to local communities.

### ***Access to Lands for Wildlife Recreation***

Access to lands for hunting, trapping, and other outdoor recreation strongly influences participation in these activities. Individuals are more likely to pursue hunting activities if available lands are within 15 miles of their residence. Michigan benefits from the second largest acreage of public land in states east of the Mississippi River, yet nearly 90% of residents live in southern Michigan where only 3% of the land is publicly owned. In the Upper Peninsula there are about 20 acres of land per person whereas the southeast Lower Peninsula has only 0.04 acres per person open to the public for hunting and other wildlife based recreation. Both internal and external stakeholders and partners repeatedly identified the decline of hunters and the general



trend of disengagement from the outdoors as a significant issue. Private land use practices (e.g., development) continue to affect lands that were once available for recreational use and enjoyment. Over the last five years, the Hunting Access Program has expanded, and the MiHunt application has been launched to better communicate public and private land hunting opportunities. The Wildlife Division has also developed cooperative relationships with partners to make public lands more accessible to hunters with disabilities, such as Michigan Operation Freedom Outdoors.

### ***Hunting Heritage***

The pivotal role that hunters and trappers have played in the restoration and sustainable management of Michigan's wildlife is underappreciated by many in the conservation community. Those who do not understand or appreciate the cultural heritage of hunting and trapping and the direct link to conservation may inadvertently support legislation that restricts hunting and trapping without realizing they may be reducing revenues for management of lands and wildlife they enjoy. Hunting and trapping are an important part of Michigan's cultural heritage, providing men and women the opportunity to share time outdoors and to harvest their own sustainable and local food. Unfortunately, the number of hunters and trappers in Michigan has declined over the last five years, and demographic projections show a much sharper decline in the next 15 years. Many other factors also influence the decline of hunting and trapping, yet a large and engaged population of hunters and trappers has enabled Michigan to be a leader in environmental protection. Even as the proportion of wildlife conservationists who hunt and trap declines, Michigan's hunting heritage, including hunter retention and recruitment, has been a core part of our Division's history and will be a focus of our future.

### ***External Communication***

During the creation of the first GPS, external communications was often identified as a shortcoming during focus group meetings. The Wildlife Division continues to have diverse stakeholders and partners, and communicating about the priorities and management decisions can be difficult. Over the last 5 years, the Wildlife Division has dedicated effort towards addressing these concerns. As part of our progress, the Wildlife Division now has dedicated staff who focused on public education, outreach and engagement. Our work as a Division is complemented by the Department's Marketing and Outreach Division. Some highlights of our success in this area include a detailed annual report, increased social media presence, informational videos, website updates, regular press releases, increased exposure on TV, radio, and newspaper media and wildlife marketing campaigns.

### ***Positive Relationships***

Fostering positive relationships with individuals, groups and organizations interested in wildlife resources continues to be important for the Wildlife Division. Stakeholders and partners continue to desire and appreciate opportunities to engage the Wildlife Division in our shared goals of conserving wildlife resources. Progress has been made in each of the four broad needs highlighted in the original GPS. The Wildlife Division has entered into many new partnerships and continued existing partnerships to achieve common goals. We recognize that the broad

mandate of managing wildlife resources cannot be successfully addressed by the Wildlife Division alone. Even as we have made great strides in creating and fostering positive relationships, we look towards continuously improving. We continue to strive to make greater use of the power of relationships.

### ***Internal Communication***

The Wildlife Division continues to work on increasing clarity of priorities, improving accountability, and better defining expectations from the Wildlife Division leadership related to day-to-day work to increase effectiveness. The Wildlife Division continues to make progress toward improving communication internally through development and implementation of an internal communications plan. This plan identifies and clarifies the appropriate use and purpose of a variety of communication tools. As technology and issues change, improvements to the methods and means of communication will be updated. This important piece to effective business practices will continue to improve.

### ***Workforce***

In the original scoping for the GPS in 2009, there was a general perception among the public that field staff are passionate, often are considered experts, and were easy to communicate with and helpful; however, there was less understanding of the role played by Division staff in Lansing. In addition, many felt the Wildlife Division was “overwhelmed and underappreciated.” Division employees identified concerns related to the work environment, accountability, and professional development opportunities. The Wildlife Division now places a greater emphasis on accountability and uses metrics and work planning as tools to enhance each employee’s ability to succeed. The Wildlife Division’s new training programs stresses that professional development is a joint venture where both have responsibilities and both benefit. In addition, the Division strives to employ wildlife professionals that are the best fit to the Wildlife Division and Department priorities and needs. The future strength of the Division rests on hiring the most qualified individuals and fostering their continued growth.

### ***Internal Administration***

Wildlife Division employees across the State identified inefficient administrative processes as being a barrier to successfully implementing habitat and population management projects during the original GPS engagement process. These concerns were largely related to a lack of procedural understanding, stringent legal mandates, need for administrative help, complicated and hierarchal approval paths, and redundant processes. The Wildlife Division continue to make progress on these issues, including improved process tracking databases, a better integrated work planning and budgeting process, and dedicated staff for administrative support.

### ***Infrastructure***

Infrastructure consists of the physical resources necessary for the Division to accomplish its mission, including buildings, technology, equipment, vehicles, pumps, dikes, dams, roads, bridges, and other structures constructed and maintained by Division staff. Currently, the

Division has infrastructure ranging from brand new construction such as pump stations in the Saginaw Bay Management Unit, to aging dams in the Southwest Management Unit in need of emergency repair, to network connections still dependent upon dial-up phone lines. This diverse array of infrastructure requires routine maintenance and periodic upgrading in order to ensure continued usefulness.

### ***Funding***

The Wildlife Division annual budget comes from a number of sources. Fees from the sale of state hunting and trapping licenses constitute a significant portion of the Division's budget. In 2014, a hunting and trapping license restructure went into effect allowing for additional revenue from this source. Federal funding makes up approximately 50% of the Division's budget mostly through an excise tax on guns, ammunition, bows, and arrows. Part of the federal funding is national competitive grants. The Nongame Fund (includes wildlife habitat license plate fees) and other sources make up a small portion of the overall budget. In fiscal year 2015, only about 5% of the Division budget came from the state's general fund (i.e., tax revenue). Current funding is used to support a wide array of wildlife programs such as the maintenance of nearly 400,000 acres of State Game and Wildlife Areas, statewide habitat initiatives, operation of managed waterfowl areas, threatened and endangered species recovery efforts, wildlife health monitoring, and co-management of nearly 4 million acres of State forest. Although there is a general lack of understanding among the public about how the Wildlife Division is funded, there is support to explore new and stable funding options for Division programs. Because a large proportion of funding is derived from license sales, concern continues to be expressed over the decline in participation in hunting and trapping recreation, and longer-term projections that this decline will become quite large once the last of the baby-boomers reach their sixties. Unless there is a change in how the Wildlife Division is funded in the near future, the financial resources available will likely be inadequate to continue to restore or even sustainably manage Michigan's wildlife for future citizens.

### ***Managing Adaptively***

The Wildlife Division strives to be proactive and adaptive, rather than reactive. This requires forward-looking goals, strategic thinking, and a commitment to monitoring the results of our management efforts. Especially with wildlife, adaptive management is critical to providing science-based recommendations. The work culture of the Wildlife Division has not always included evaluating effectiveness of past initiatives, administrative or otherwise, but we have made progress towards transparency through metric development and annual reports. The Wildlife Division now has staff focused specifically on planning and adaptation, and progress has been made in standardizing plan components without losing flexibility. Improvements to these processes using an adaptive approach continues to make the Wildlife Division more effective.

## **DESTINATIONS – GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES**

We have arranged the 13 identified issues or waypoints into the following five destinations. For each, we describe what the landscape will look like when we arrive in 2020. The routes we have chosen to arrive at these destinations are provided in the goals, objectives, and strategies.

### ***Securing the Future of Michigan's Wildlife***

**Our Vision of Success in 2020:** Michigan has healthy, abundant, and diverse wildlife that people enjoy for hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, and for its cultural and intrinsic value. Wildlife population and habitat management occurs on all land ownerships at ecologically appropriate scales according to statewide priorities. The Wildlife Division manages wildlife to fulfill public trust responsibilities, to provide wildlife recreation opportunities, and to conserve rare species. We administer at the regional level to focus management on regional issues. Decisions are supported by scientific facts and principles, and reflect the needs of species, desires of partners and concerns of stakeholders, and changing conditions and information. We continually evaluate our work to ensure we are effective stewards of Michigan's natural resources. The Wildlife Division provides technical support to land use planning and economic development efforts to limit and mitigate negative impacts on wildlife. We work with partners to secure the future of Michigan's wildlife and their habitats.

**Goal 1:** Manage for healthy and sustainable populations of wildlife

**Objective 1.1:** Develop, implement, and revise management plans and guidance for priority game species and species of greatest conservation need

#### **Strategies:**

- 1.1.1:** Improve coordination of the planning process by better linking statewide and regional priorities
- 1.1.2:** Write, review, and revise species management plans as needed
- 1.1.3:** Use species management plans and guidance to inform annual work planning decisions
- 1.1.4:** Incorporate climate change vulnerabilities and opportunities when setting management goals and developing management strategies
- 1.1.5:** Collaborate with other divisions and partners to incorporate wildlife species plans into their management priorities

**Objective 1.2:** Conduct research, monitoring, and assessments to improve management of wildlife populations

**Strategies:**

- 1.2.1:** Identify and prioritize information needs to focus research and monitoring
- 1.2.2:** Monitor the condition of wildlife populations through surveys, modeling, and surveillance
- 1.2.3:** Conduct research to address priority conservation questions identified in species plans
- 1.2.4:** Assess desires of stakeholder groups and citizens to inform wildlife population management
- 1.2.5:** Manage research and monitoring information and make it available to support the conservation of wildlife populations
- 1.2.6:** Engage and promote citizen collection of scientific information
- 1.2.7:** Collaborate with key partners to support research and monitoring

**Objective 1.3:** Monitor and preserve the health of Michigan's wildlife

**Strategies:**

- 1.3.1:** Develop and implement strategies to prevent and control diseases before they occur
- 1.3.2:** Respond to wildlife disease outbreaks
- 1.3.3:** Protect free-ranging wildlife from disease by regulating captive wildlife facilities
- 1.3.4:** Conduct research and monitoring to provide information to make management recommendations regarding wildlife disease
- 1.3.5:** Raise awareness regarding current and emerging wildlife health issues
- 1.3.6:** Work with state and federal agencies, and stakeholders to address wildlife health issues

**Objective 1.4:** Develop and recommend policies and regulations that meet our legal responsibilities to sustain healthy populations of wildlife

**Strategies:**

- 1.4.1:** Set and communicate regional and state priorities for population management
- 1.4.2:** Recommend science-based hunting and trapping regulations to the Natural Resources Commission
- 1.4.3:** Fulfill our state and federal regulatory responsibilities for migratory birds, and for threatened and endangered species
- 1.4.4:** Use advisory committees to help develop recommendations for regulating wildlife
- 1.4.5:** Collaborate with other divisions, government agencies, and tribes when developing policies and regulations
- 1.4.6:** Evaluate existing regulations to inform future recommendations using license sales, harvest data, and other information
- 1.4.7:** Distribute high demand hunting opportunities for various species through a license lottery system
- 1.4.8:** Maintain a permitting process for the possession and take of wildlife

**Objective 1.5:** Address and where possible resolve human-wildlife conflict

**Strategies:**

- 1.5.1:** Collaborate with public agencies and private enterprises to resolve human-wildlife conflict
- 1.5.2:** Develop and implement nuisance and invasive wildlife policies and programs to reduce human-wildlife conflict in both rural and urban communities
- 1.5.3:** Provide information that assists people in minimizing human-wildlife conflict

**Goal 2:** Manage habitat for sustainable wildlife populations and wildlife-based recreation

**Objective 2.1:** Develop, implement, and revise management plans and guidance for priority habitats

**Strategies:**

- 2.1.1:** Improve coordination of the planning process by better linking statewide and regional priorities
- 2.1.2:** Use a featured species approach to focus and communicate habitat management priorities at appropriate scales
- 2.1.3:** Describe desired future habitat conditions and management direction through Master Planning and Compartment Review Process
- 2.1.4:** Work with partners on habitat planning
- 2.1.5:** Incorporate the risks of positive or negative climate change impacts on priority habitat plans

**Objective 2.2:** Implement and assist others with habitat management for priority species and habitats

**Strategies:**

- 2.2.1:** Manage habitat on wildlife areas to support featured species management targets, wildlife-based recreation, and to demonstrate habitat improvement techniques to conservation partners
- 2.2.2:** Implement statewide habitat priorities
- 2.2.3:** Address priority invasive species management needs
- 2.2.4:** Fulfill our state and federal regulatory responsibilities to ensure compliance of habitat management with applicable laws and regulations
- 2.2.5:** Manage habitat to reduce climate-driven risks to human communities and wildlife resources
- 2.2.6:** On co-managed lands, work collaboratively with Forest Resources Division, Parks and Recreation Division, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to manage wildlife habitat
- 2.2.7:** On private lands, provide technical assistance and resources to support Wildlife Division's habitat management needs

**Objective 2.3:** Conduct research, monitoring, and assessments to improve management of wildlife habitat

**Strategies:**

- 2.3.1:** Identify and prioritize information needs to focus research and monitoring
- 2.3.2:** Conduct habitat research to inform habitat management decisions
- 2.3.3:** Implement monitoring to evaluate management actions
- 2.3.4:** Conduct assessments of quality and distribution of habitat to inform priorities in habitat planning and implementation
- 2.3.5:** Identify emerging issues and provide recommendations for addressing these issues

**Objective 2.4:** Maintain public access and habitat infrastructure for wildlife management purposes

**Strategies:**

- 2.4.1:** Maintain all infrastructure supporting habitat projects in a safe and operable condition
- 2.4.2:** Develop or revise policies and procedures guiding allowable infrastructure uses
- 2.4.3:** Determine where standardization of certain aspects of game area maintenance is needed and implement consistent practices

**Goal 3:** Administer and promote effective stewardship of lands for wildlife habitats and wildlife-based recreation

**Objective 3.1:** Protect Department-owned or administered lands and infrastructure acquired and managed for wildlife purposes from uses that interfere with wildlife management

**Strategies:**

- 3.1.1:** Monitor and respond to legislation, regulations, policy, and procedures that may impact Department-owned lands purchased and managed for wildlife purposes
- 3.1.2:** Implement and follow policies and procedures to address allowable land uses, and species and habitat objectives on Department-owned lands based on fund sources
- 3.1.3:** Resolve land matters consistently to protect lands for their intended wildlife purposes



**3.1.4:** Develop and implement a process to monitor wildlife project boundaries for trespass

**3.1.5:** On co-managed lands, work collaboratively with Forest Resources Division, Parks and Recreation Division, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to consider wildlife values in land use decisions

**Objective 3.2:** Align land portfolio with Department and Wildlife Division priorities and goals

**Strategies:**

**3.2.1:** Implement and update Wildlife Division land acquisition strategy

**3.2.2:** Recommend disposal of land that will not meet the goals of the Department and Wildlife Division

**3.2.3:** Obtain funds for strategic land acquisition

**Objective 3.3:** Develop and implement a strategy to assist local and regional decision makers to incorporate wildlife needs and wildlife-based recreation into land use planning, policymaking, and legislation

**Strategies:**

**3.3.1:** Engage civic leaders for targeted partnerships

**3.3.2:** Enhance our understanding of the role of civic leaders, policymakers, and landowners both regionally and locally

**3.3.3:** Provide tools, information, and materials to land managers that are user friendly

**3.3.4:** Prioritize and implement needs for outreach and education

**3.3.5:** Establish and train designated Wildlife Division staff on how to include wildlife needs and their habitats into land-use planning to provide support to stakeholders

**3.3.6:** Develop and maintain a land-use planning web presence

**3.3.7:** Provide state legislators with information to increase the likelihood that Wildlife Division goals are considered in legislation

***Enhancing Wildlife Recreation***

**Our Vision of Success in 2020:** Michigan citizens value and support our hunting and trapping heritage. Citizens also are aware of the role hunting and trapping have in managing game species, providing a local sustainable food source, and the significant financial contributions

these activities have on the state's economy and wildlife conservation. Participation in hunting, trapping, wildlife-based recreation is increasing across the state resulting in more stewards of wildlife and their needed habitats. Access to land for hunting, trapping, and other wildlife-based recreational activities has expanded across all land ownerships, especially in areas close to population centers. Participation continues to increase, driving more citizen engagement and broadening the kinds of wildlife-based activities that people do throughout the year.

**Goal 4:** Enhance sustainable wildlife-based recreation use and enjoyment

**Objective 4.1:** Expand opportunities for people to engage in hunting, trapping, and wildlife-based recreation

- 4.1.1:** Foster effective communication, outreach, and promotion of opportunities
- 4.1.2:** Enhance the Hunter Access Program to increase enrollment to at least 24,000 acres and seek long-term funding support
- 4.1.3:** Work with partners to improve access on lands not managed by the Wildlife Division
- 4.1.4:** Develop and implement a public access plan to improve access for wildlife-based recreational activities
- 4.1.5:** Enhance wildlife-based recreational access and opportunity through habitat and infrastructure development and improvements on public lands
- 4.1.6:** Engage citizens in the collection of scientific information as a recreational pursuit
- 4.1.7:** Offer assistance to municipalities and conservation partners to support wildlife recreation
- 4.1.8:** Enhance engagement in year-round activities to help bridge the gaps in seasonal wildlife-based recreational activities

**Objective 4.2:** Increase the retention rate of hunting and trapping license purchasers

**Strategies:**

- 4.2.1:** Support research and surveys to identify ways to increase hunter and trapper retention
- 4.2.2:** Increase small game hunting opportunities and promote small game hunting on public and private lands, especially in southern Michigan
- 4.2.3:** Recommend regulations that are easy to understand and support hunter and trapper retention

**4.2.4:** Remove obstacles to participation and purchasing licenses

**4.2.5:** Explore incentives to encourage repeated license buying

**Objective 4.3:** Increase the recruitment of hunting and trapping license purchasers

**Strategies:**

**4.3.1:** Support research and surveys to identify ways to increase hunter and trapper recruitment in Michigan

**4.3.2:** Increase small game hunting opportunities on public and private lands, especially in southern Michigan

**4.3.3:** Work with conservation partners to promote hunting and trapping and implement mentoring programs

**4.3.4:** Support efforts to diversify the hunting and trapping community

**Objective 4.4:** Increase retention of participants in wildlife-based recreation

**Strategies:**

**4.4.1:** Support research and surveys to identify ways to increase wildlife-based recreation

**4.4.2:** Monitor the changes and desires of wildlife recreationists

**4.4.3:** Identify and remove obstacles to participation

**4.4.4:** Develop programs and partnerships to expand opportunities that diversify the wildlife-based recreation community

**Objective 4.5:** Increase recruitment of participants in wildlife-based recreation

**Strategies:**

**4.5.1:** Support research and surveys to identify ways to increase the non-consumptive wildlife recreation community

**4.5.2:** Develop wildlife appreciation using various media with partners

**4.5.3:** Expand outreach to shooting sports enthusiasts to promote additional wildlife recreational opportunities

**4.5.4:** Work with conservation partners to promote wildlife-based recreation and develop mentoring programs

- 4.5.5:** Develop and implement efforts to diversify the wildlife-based recreation community

*Serving Michigan Citizens*

**Our Vision of Success in 2020:** Communication and engagement with the public is open and meaningful. The Wildlife Division's communications strategy includes messages to the public that are consistent and understandable. Our partnerships are strong, resulting in a large number of wildlife conservation projects across the state. Our communication efforts foster a trusting relationship with partners and the public, resulting in less controversy and enabling the fulfillment of common goals for wildlife management and conservation.

**Goal 5:** Improve and maintain public communication, strong relationships, and partnerships

**Objective 5.1:** Expand education and outreach efforts

**Strategies:**

- 5.1.1:** Provide staff with public communications training and tools
- 5.1.2:** Provide information and materials to the public that are user friendly
- 5.1.3:** Continually assess and prioritize outreach and education needs and effort
- 5.1.4:** Continue to work with the Department's marketing team on Wildlife Division and Department key messaging
- 5.1.5:** Work with the Department's marketing team and the Michigan Wildlife Council to increase public acceptance of hunting and trapping
- 5.1.6:** Use the latest social science to develop effective media and other marketing materials to reach relevant audiences
- 5.1.7:** Evaluate education and outreach efforts
- 5.1.8:** Deliver outreach and education programs on key messaging

**Objective 5.2:** Inform and engage the public in decision making and planning in the Wildlife Division

**Strategies:**

- 5.2.1:** Better communicate opportunities for public engagement
- 5.2.2:** Use the latest social science to develop effective public engagement
- 5.2.3:** Continually assess and prioritize engagement needs and efforts

**5.2.4:** Inform participants of the decision-making process

**5.2.5:** Provide feedback on decision-making processes and rationales after the engagement process has been completed

**5.2.6:** Evaluate the effectiveness of public engagement efforts

**Objective 5.3:** Foster positive relationships through collaborations and partnerships to implement Wildlife Division goals

**Strategies:**

**5.3.1:** Provide opportunities for partnerships

**5.3.2:** Work with civic leaders on opportunities to partner or collaborate

**5.3.3:** Provide opportunities for volunteers

**5.3.4:** Provide financial and technical resources to partners

**5.3.5:** Increase opportunities for staff to interact with key Wildlife Division contractors

**5.3.6:** Measure, evaluate, and highlight success of existing partnerships

**5.3.7:** Continually assess and prioritize partnership needs and efforts

**5.3.8:** Develop a shared vision of emerging issues and conservation opportunities with partners

***Improving How We Work***

**Our Vision of Success in 2020:** The Wildlife Division has a collaborative culture that promotes effective business practices. This culture is supported by open and honest communication and regular contact among employees. Similarly, the Wildlife Division maintains open and honest communication across the Department and with the Natural Resources Commission. Employees value the Wildlife Division because they feel the Wildlife Division values them. The Wildlife Division hires and develops promising and competent employees, outfits them with a modern workplace, and retains them for a career. The Wildlife Division invests in our employees. The Wildlife Division provides employees with effective administrative support and resources to ensure work priorities are accomplished and funded. Gaps in funding priorities are identified and strategies are in place to help fill those gaps.

**Goal 6:** Foster and adopt effective business practices

**Objective 6.1:** Foster regular, effective, open and honest communications and relationships among employees

**Strategies:**

- 6.1.1:** Implement the Wildlife Division's internal communication plan
- 6.1.2:** Evaluate the communication plan on a regular basis to ensure we are meeting objectives
- 6.1.3:** Increase personal methods (e.g., phone calls, face-to-face meetings) of communication between staff
- 6.1.4:** Define and communicate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authorities for different positions
- 6.1.5:** Provide annual opportunities for all Wildlife Division staff to meet in person to build relationships, share successes and lessons learned, and increase collaborations
- 6.1.6:** Develop and implement a mentoring program for staff that includes a field-based and a Lansing-based mentor

**Objective 6.2:** Support Wildlife Division programs through effective administration and resources

**Strategies:**

- 6.2.1:** Annually streamline and improve administrative processes
- 6.2.2:** Implement and provide guidance for administrative programs statewide
- 6.2.3:** Implement and provide guidance for human resources support
- 6.2.4:** Provide all staff with appropriate facilities and business support tools
- 6.2.5:** Provide staff with appropriate equipment for maintaining facilities and habitat
- 6.2.6:** Implement the Wildlife Division's Technology Strategic Plan
- 6.2.7:** Provide Wildlife Division guidance, oversight, and support
- 6.2.8:** Provide regional guidance, oversight, and support

**Objective 6.3:** Attract a highly qualified and diverse workforce

**Strategies:**

- 6.3.1:** Use a deliberate and collaborative process, such as the Position Management Model, to prioritize and fill vacancies

**6.3.2:** Seek highly qualified applicants, and hire through an open and competitive process for permanent and acting positions

**6.3.3:** Explore barriers to attracting a diverse workforce

**Objective 6.4:** Develop and retain a highly qualified and diverse workforce

**6.4.1:** Implement and continuously improve the Career Development University (CDU)

**6.4.2:** Implement a professional development plan for each employee based on classification training expectations

**6.3.3:** Set clear expectations of roles and responsibilities for each employee

**6.4.4:** Enhance leadership experience opportunities

**6.4.5:** Identify key positions or programs where continuity and leadership are essential, and develop a succession plan

**6.4.6:** Measure employee satisfaction every two years and address factors that decrease employee satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention

**6.4.7:** Increase effective communications and accountability by improving engagement between staff and supervisors

**Objective 6.5:** Strategically fund priorities identified in this plan

**Strategies:**

**6.5.1:** Develop an annual operational budget that aligns plan priorities with available monies

**6.5.2:** Evaluate spending quarterly to ensure implementation is effective, and make adjustments as needed

**6.5.3:** Identify and secure resources to fund priorities

**Objective 6.6:** Develop a strategic long-term funding plan for wildlife conservation

**Strategies:**

**6.6.1:** Develop a strategic long-term budget outlining needs and priorities for the Wildlife Division.

**6.6.2:** Work with the Department's Executive Division, legislators, and partners to develop a secure, long-term funding strategy to support the Wildlife Division's goals and mission

***Re-routing While Staying on Course***

**Our Vision of Success in 2020:** The Wildlife Division is an agency with a culture that values learning and innovation. We recognize in a changing environment we cannot be certain of the outcomes of management practices. However, rather than hesitating, we keep moving forward, carefully monitoring and assessing the effects of our actions to learn from them. We are prepared to respond to emerging issues and unforeseen challenges without reacting in ways that divert us from arriving at our five-year destinations. Our Division culture encourages and supports employees to take innovative approaches, especially to unexpected roadblocks and detours. The Wildlife Division uses its strategic plan to implement our strategic objectives while learning, adapting, and holding ourselves accountable.

**Goal 7:** Develop and implement systems that lead to continuous improvement in how we work

**Objective 7.1:** Enhance and sustain a learning organization

**Strategies:**

**7.1.1:** Provide a work environment that fosters innovation and learning

**7.1.2:** Develop a system to disseminate and retain knowledge across the Wildlife Division

**7.1.3:** Incorporate after-action review for major projects

**Objective 7.2:** Implement established priorities while proactively adapting to change

**Strategies:**

**7.2.1:** Develop a system to monitor and appropriately respond to emerging issues and long-term trends

**7.2.2:** Increase support to implement established priorities by engaging stakeholders

**7.2.3:** Continuously improve the work-planning process

**Objective 7.3:** Increase accountability by monitoring, assessing, and reporting our progress towards implementing the GPS

**Strategies:**

**7.3.1:** Develop and implement a system to establish operational expectations and priorities across the Wildlife Division

**7.3.2:** Expand and improve the use of metrics as an assessment tool

**7.3.3:** Annually produce report on accomplishments to staff and public

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## **CONTINUING OUR JOURNEY**

We are continuing our journey into the future of wildlife management and conservation in Michigan using our key navigational aid, the GPS. Wildlife Division staff are committed to implementing the plan and managing Michigan's wildlife resources responsibly. Involvement from citizens, stakeholders, partners, and staff continues to be crucial for the success of this plan as we navigate into the future. Michigan citizens, stakeholders, and our partners help to ensure we are moving towards our destinations by assisting with projects and holding the Wildlife Division accountable to the direction set by this GPS and fulfilling our common vision.

By managing adaptively, the Wildlife Division is becoming a learning organization with improved performance and accountability. Adaptive management requires that management activities are designed as experiments with expectations described in advance. Progress is monitored and evaluated to understand how planned actions met expectations. Comparisons between expected outcomes and actual outcomes are made and activities are adjusted as needed to improve our work.

The GPS contains the routes and destinations of the next leg of our five-year trip. We have created our itinerary through our goals, objectives, and strategies and will detail the needed maps for getting the work done through annual work plans and budgets to properly allocate our staff and resources. We will continue to publish our annual report to allow the public, stakeholders, and our partners to monitor our progress. This report highlights what was actually accomplished.

The Wildlife Division plans, monitors, and evaluates our annual progress of the GPS. Changes may occur based on new information or circumstances, and we will take the necessary detours to still follow our routes and reach our destinations. These reviews and evaluations along with continued engagement with our partners ensure the GPS remains active and relevant in a changing environment as it directs us towards our common vision for wildlife conservation in Michigan.